

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 NIC-01 ACDA-19 MBFR-03 SAJ-01 IO-13

OMB-01 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-02 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10

PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-12 RSR-01 /129 W

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R 291728Z JUN 73

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7976

INFO SECDEF WASHDC

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO

USDELMC

USNMR SHAPE

USCINCEUR

DIA WASHDC

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E.O.11652:N/A

TAGS: MARR, PINT, BE

SUBJECT: SOCIALIST VIEWS ON BELGIAN DEFENSE REFORMS

REF: BRUSSELS A-109, MAY 9, 1973

1. IN A PREVIEW OF SOCIALIST PARTY (PSB) THINKING IN ADVANCE OF NEXT APRIL'S PSB "DOCTRINAL CONGRESS", PARTY CO-PRESIDENTS COOLS AND VAN EYNDE INDICATED ON JUNE 28 THAT THEPSB PROGRAM WOULD CALL FOR A REDUCTION IN THE TERM OF MILITARY SERVICE TO SIX MONTHS, TO BE ACCOMPLISHED IN FOUR TO FIVE YEARS WITH A FIRST-STEP REDUCTION TO TEN AND TWELVE MONTHS (IN GERMANY AND BELGIUM, RESPECTIVELY). ACCORDING TO JUNE 29 ACCOUNT IN "LE PEUPLE", OFFICIAL DAILY ORGAN OF THE PSB, THE PRGRAM WILL SUPPORT THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF DEFERMENTS AND RECOMMEND

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COMPENSATING FOR THE SHORTENED TERM OF SERVICE BY THE INTRUDUCTION

OF RECRUITMENT OF VOLUNTEERS FOR THREE-YEAR TERMS. THE PSB STUDY REPORTEDLY ESTIMATES A TOTAL COST OF THREE AND A HALF BILLION BELGIAN FRANCS OVER FOUR YEARS TO BRING THE VOLUNTEER SEGMENT OF MILITARY PERSONNEL UP TO A DESIRED 33,000.

2. COINCIDENTALLY, THE PRESS REPORTED THIS WEEK THAT MINISTER OF NATIONAL EDUCATION (FRANCOPHONE) TOUSSAINT HAS FORWARDED TO MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE VANDEN BOEYNANTS A REPORT OF THE RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO 161 EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS REPRESENTING 150,000 FRANCOPHONE STUDENTS. AS REPORTED, THE RESPONSES WERE SUBSTANTIALLY IN FAVOR OF RETAINING THE PRESENT DEFERMENT SYSTEM WHILE REDUCING THE TERMS OF MILITARY SERVICE.

3. ON JUNE 20, VANDEN BOEYNANTS MET WITH A GROUP OF SOME SEVENTY CITIZENS TO DISCUSS HIS PROPOSED DEFENSE REFORMS, BUT THE ENCOUNTER DEGENERATED INTO A CHORUS OF CATCALLS FROM STUDENTS AND PROTESTS OVER THE STATIONING OF A BRIGADE IN MARCHE-EN-FAMENNE FROM FARMERS WHOSE LAND IS TO BE EXPROPRIATED.

4. COMMENT: WHEN THE SECOND EYSKENS-COOLS GOVERNMENT WAS BEING FORMED IN LATE 1971, THE PSB AGREED TO A GOVERNMENT PROGRAM CALLING FOR MILITARY SERVICE TERMS OF TEN AND TWELVE MONTHS ONLY AFTER RETREATING FROM INITIAL DEMANDS FOR SIX-MONTH TERMS. THE PSB LEADERSHIP HAS NO DOUBT NOW BEEN ENCOURAGED BY THE PUBLIC OPPOSITION MET BY VANDEN BOEYNANTS IN HIS CAMPAIGN FOR THE ELIMINATION OF DEFERMENTS. SHOULD THE PSB FINALLY INCLUDE A SIX-MONTH TERM OF SERVICE IN THE PARTY PROGRAM, THE DEBATE OVER DEFENSE REFORMS WILL FOR THE FIRST TIME TAKE ON AN IDENTIFIABLY PARTISAN COLOATION AND COULD THEN PLAY A ROLE IN THE NEXT ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN. FOR THE PRESENT, SOCIALIST PRIME MINISTER LEBURTON WILL BE BOUND BY HIS GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAM AND NOT BY ANY NEW DECLARATION OF PSB POLICY. MEANWHILE, VANDEN BOEYNANTS APPEARS TO BE GETTING NOWHERE IN HIS STRUGGLE TO GAIN ACCEPTANCE OF HIS PET DEFERMENT/ CONSCRIPTION-TIME PROJECT. STRAUSZ-HUPE

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